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UNCLAS JERUSALEM 002300

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SENSITIVE

NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE AND NEA/IPA; PRM FOR PRM/ANE; NSC FOR
PASCUAL; PLEASE PASS TO USAID FOR KUNDER/MCCLOUD/BORODIN

E.O. 12958: N/A
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SUBJECT: GAZA HUMANITARIAN UPDATE -- DECEMBER 29

¶1. (SBU) Summary: An estimated 55 truckloads of humanitarian supplies entered Gaza through Kerem Shalom crossing on December 29, according to UN contacts. 21 truckloads entered on December 28. Food levels remain critically low, and no fuel has entered Gaza since December 26. End Summary.

Humanitarian Assistance

¶2. (SBU) Approximately 55 trucks entered Gaza via Kerem Shalom on December 29, the majority of which contained food supplies. Seven truckloads contained medical supplies -- three for the Ministry of Health, three for ICRC, and one for UNRWA. Five ambulances were delivered by the ICRC. In addition, three truckloads of medical supplies from Egyptian Red Crescent entered Gaza via Rafah crossing. On December 28, 21 truckloads -- including 15 for humanitarian aid agencies -- entered via Kerem Shalom.

Medical Supplies and Health Care

¶3. (SBU) There are 27 hospitals in Gaza (13 are MOH, the remainder are private and NGO-run) with roughly a 2,000-bed capacity. ICRC and PRCS have identified priority needs as emergency surgical kits, emergency first aid kits, IV fluids, and spare parts for generators and other medical equipment. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), current pharmaceutical stocks are sufficient for less than one week in a conflict environment, and 25 percent of essential pharmaceuticals and 225 consumable medical items are at zero stocks. On December 28, ICRC and UNICEF delivered 400 "war wounded" kits and 300 first aid kits to Gaza hospitals. However, health sector workers in Gaza are overwhelmed with more than 900 injured, at least 115 of whom are in critical condition. Health workers report they are having difficulty reaching their places of work due to ongoing IAF strikes.

Food supplies

¶4. (SBU) The most urgent food need in Gaza is for wheat grain/flour, according to WHO contacts. UNRWA's emergency food program for 750,000 Palestinian refugees in Gaza has been suspended since December 19 as a result of flour shortages. Bakeries across Gaza are also reportedly closed. UNRWA requires 3,000 MT of wheat (100 truckloads) to clear the backlogged distributions and another 250 MT (7-8 truckloads) per day for regular distributions.

¶5. (SBU) On December 28, ten trucks of flour for WFP and three trucks of food items for the private sector entered Gaza. On December 29, UNRWA planned to bring in 10 truckloads of rice, sugar, and milk through Kerem Shalom and 1,200 metric tons of wheat via the Karni conveyor belt. However, as of 1600, Karni was closed. UNRWA contacts noted

that importing bulk wheat grain is not possible at any other crossing.

¶6. (SBU) Local business contacts report that few goods are coming through the Gaza tunnel system, as tunnel operators are concerned about IDF airstrikes and are staying home.

Fuel Supplies

¶7. (SBU) No fuel has entered Gaza since December 26. The power plant remained operational through December 29 with one turbine, but will be forced to shut down around midnight. UNRWA reports that it has sufficient petrol and diesel reserves for three weeks of operations, and can support hospital generators on a limited basis for one month.

Cash

¶8. (SBU) The cash shortage in the formal banking sector remains a critical issue. UNRWA's cash assistance program for 94,000 special hardship cases remains suspended since November 20, and UNRWA staff were paid only 50 percent of their December salaries.

WALLES